

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM



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DEAR MEMBER,

Failure to reach an immediate settlement in India does not mean that the visit of the Lord Privy Seal has been in vain. New moral forces have been awakened. That in itself is an achievement of major importance. The bold re-affirmation by the British Government of its faith in the principles which have guided the growth of the British Commonwealth is a powerful contribution to political education. Everything depends on how far the lessons of the past few weeks are heeded.

THE EDUCATIVE VALUE OF THE INDIAN DISCUSSIONS

The way of freedom is undoubtedly perilous. Education is a slow process; events in war move fast. If we cannot learn quickly enough, or agreement cannot be reached on the basis of freedom, barbarism may triumph. But for the United Nations there is no other way. The spirit of freedom has infected our tradition too deeply and entered too much into our blood for us to beat the Axis Powers by their methods. The only hope for us is to stake everything on the difference between our own tradition and the reactionary doctrines to which we are opposed. This was the keynote of Sir Stafford Cripps' final broadcast to the people of India. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru made it clear that, in spite of his long opposition to the British Government, he was *much less* willing to see the Indian people give in or be passive towards the Japanese, and that he was not going to do anything to embarrass Britain's war effort.

The debates in India have been an education of world opinion, notably in America and China. A real danger of misunderstanding between America and this country has been to some extent removed. Many Americans have realized for the first time that the Indian question is not simply a question of British "imperialism," but that there is also a purely Indian problem of agreement between its diverse communities.

There are lessons also for us, which it may be hoped that we have laid to heart. Why should we have waited till the eleventh hour to make our intentions about India's future unmistakably clear, and to lay the responsibility for that future on Indians themselves? Sir Stafford Cripps rightly referred to the great difficulties which *history* placed in the way of a settlement of the relations between the British and the Indian peoples. We need to understand the deep distrust which our attitude in the past has implanted in Indian minds. The press in this country has shown, with one or two exceptions, an admirable restraint in discussing the breakdown of the relations. But it may be doubted whether there is as yet on our side sufficient imaginative understanding of what it means for a great and proud people to have been committed to war without its own consent, while small countries like Eire and Egypt have enjoyed the freedom to choose, and how natural it is for men of high spirit to desire in a major crisis of their country's history to bear the full responsibility for its defence. I am not suggesting that the British Government could, when the enemy are at the gates, abrogate its responsibility for the defence

of the peoples of India or allow its power to fulfil that responsibility to be crippled, but only that the sensitiveness of Indians in the matter needs to be fully understood.

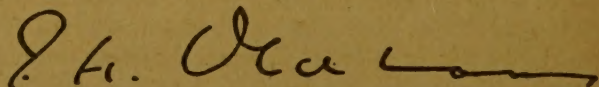
Most of all, perhaps, the events of the past few weeks have been an education for the peoples of India themselves, because the British Government has genuinely stood aside, as never before, and laid the responsibility of deciding the future on the leaders of the Indian communities. Faced with this responsibility these leaders have shown greater powers of criticism and dialectical skill than of the political capacity for what is sometimes called compromise, but might better be described as integration. The leaders of the different communities have been chiefly concerned to demand the full satisfaction of their own claims, and have shown little interest in the search for an integral solution in which justice would be done to the claims of all.

This is the supreme lesson which the Indian discussions, set on the public stage with the whole world looking on, ought to bring home, not only to Indians but to all of us. The major political issue before mankind is to find an alternative to totalitarianism. We shall never find it unless we have the courage to face the price that has to be paid for it. There are only two ways in which society can be held together. The one is by force and the other by free consent. If we want the latter, there must be a readiness of each party to pass beyond insistence on the full satisfaction of its own claim to the discovery how that satisfaction can be combined with the satisfaction of other claims in a higher common good. If this is not achieved, there is nothing left but for one party to try to impose its claim by force, and there is no escape from chaos except in dictatorship. This respect for other points of view and concern for the good of the whole is at bottom a religious issue ; it has its spring in religious faith.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

A recent volume in the C.N.-L. Books series is *What is Christian Education?* by Marjorie Reeves and John Drewett, with a preface by Dorothy L. Sayers,¹ embodying the results of the common thinking of a group of teachers, clergy and parents. It opens up in an instructive way the questions in the general life of the school that have to be dealt with if we want a Christian education, and by keeping close to experience affords much practical help. Sir Walter Moberly's pamphlet, *The Churches and the Teachers*,² on the specific question of Christian teaching, is admirable both in its approach to the subject and in its presentation of the issues.

Yours sincerely,



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MYSTICISM AND MEETING

MY DEAR OLDHAM,

A reading of Aldous Huxley's *Grey Eminence* forces me to try to clarify my own mind upon the crucial issues which the book poses for our time and, in particular, for the doctrine that "all real life is meeting" which has lately (and, I think, rightly) become the recurring motif in the Christian News-Letter.

THE CLASH OF LOYALTIES

Its main theme—the co-existence in a single consciousness of two apparently irreconcilable contraries, a sincere, devoted and profoundly mystical Christianity and a pitiless power-politic, exposes the very root of the conflict and scandal of our time and our deep disease of spirit. In Father Joseph, the Christian contemplative who combined a profound religious devotion with the power-politics of Cardinal Richelieu and the Thirty Years' War, the radical cleavage of consciousness in modern man seems incarnate. Religious and secular life, the states of nature and grace were, for him, sundered hemispheres of being between which there was no tryst.

How real and radical just such a division of consciousness is to-day needs little elaboration. The co-existence of a Christian and a contrary power-ethic is everywhere in evidence. The anomaly of the high-minded, Christian gentle-man pursuing, for ends of State, policies wholly incompatible not only with Christianity, but even with the common honour of ordinary men, is a terrible commonplace. The anomaly of the Christian compelled, under the pressure of a competitive economic system, to a struggle for economic survival which no casuistry can reconcile with Christianity, is no less of a commonplace. The conflict which seems so clear in public is, for an increasing majority, no less poignant in private life.

Yet merely to call such a co-existence hypocrisy is a false simplification of the real issue. Such divided men are not hypocrites in the sense of consciously professing a creed which in action they ignore. They also live their Christian creed and often, as in the case

of Father Joseph, with an extreme austerity and self-abnegation. They have two countries and two loyalties; but there is no living link between those loyalties. Just so, in the general European consciousness, a real Christianity has existed and, though with an increasing rarity, still exists, side by side with a cynical state-craft.

The awareness of this clash of loyalties and division of consciousness seems in a direct ratio to the progress of modern psychology. It is an awareness from which the extraversion of the man of action has defended him, so that it is only in comparatively recent times that this clash has become generally acute and conscious. For the Victorian, and, in particular, for the more extraverted type, it was possible to live these two lives and to practise these two ethics simultaneously without any devastating sense of inner conflict.

But with the sudden and swift flood-lighting of the processes of consciousness which twentieth-century psychology swung upon the European soul, an unprecedented awareness has become general and the real conflict is thrown into ever bolder relief. It is a process from which even the extraverted man of action is now no longer immune. A division of consciousness which had been, in the main, unconscious or only semi-conscious has emerged, in the course of a single generation, into full consciousness.

The result, particularly in the Western democracies whose taproots run down into a sub-soil of Christian tradition, is a cleavage of feeling and faith which tends more and more towards a paralysis of will and therefore of action and decision and so, in the eventual issue, to a profound pacifism (of which the pacifist attitude towards war is only one aspect) as the sole solution of an intolerable dilemma of spirit. Such pacifism seizes what appears to be the Christian horn of the dilemma in a refusal to participate in this natural "war of all against all." On the other hand in the totalitarian countries, where the Christian tradition has been or is less

central and radical, the other horn of this dilemma is grasped. The Christian ethic is, explicitly or implicitly, abandoned and the ethic of power-politic and competition is espoused. Both are choices, the one of non-action, the other of intensified action in the cockpit of modern conditions. The one leads, in that life, to passivity and non-co-operation, the other to activism and aggression. And each choice, being only partial, is also a partial denial of life and therefore ultimately self-annihilating.

Neither pacifism nor power-politic is a reconciliation of these "mighty opposites"; each is escape and, as such, each is doomed. We cannot return to a previous unconscious co-ordination. "*Nescit vox missa reverti*"; the fatal voice of psychological prophecy cannot unsay its revealing word. Nor can a consciousness taprooted in Christianity abandon the Christian ethic without destroying itself; it is the very fibre of its being. Thus, whichever horn of this dilemma is grasped, the end is annihilation. Only from a co-ordination and reconciliation of these contraries can healing and salvation come.

That dilemma, division of consciousness, clash of loyalties may be posed in a simpler fashion. If we would save our souls (our individual psyche, our national consciousness, our life of nature) we must, it seems, play the "skin-game"; if we would save our spirits, that spiritual being which all religion subserves and "inherit eternal life," we must play the game of God. But the rules of these games are clean contrary. That essential and radical conflict runs through the entire fabric of modern life; it is no less manifest in the economic, sociological and ecclesiastical than in the political sphere. The dilemma of Father Joseph is becoming more and more the dilemma of every man.

Such, as I see it, is the real situation which confronts our faith and life to-day, and also the essential and crucial dilemma which Mr. Huxley has posed. How can Christianity or any real religion be co-ordinated with power-politics or the struggle for survival, or the life of grace with the life of nature? What is the real root of the conflict which is here so brilliantly exposed in the case of Father Joseph?

MYSTICISM

Mr. Huxley answers that question in religious terms. It is of the utmost significance that he does so for, as in all his work, his movement of mind seems peculiarly barometric to

the mood of the moment (or of the coming moment), and it is towards religion that men are again turning to-day for the ultimate solution of political and economic conflict. His answer is profound. His primary conclusion that salvation is rather to be sought from the leavening goodness of individuals and groups than from any large political planning, and that the saints or "mystics" who live in a deep communion with real Being are the salt of society is one clearly consonant with Christianity. But his analysis of the nature of mysticism and his diagnosis of modern apostasy from real religion are another matter. He finds in the Christ-centred mysticism of Father Joseph, Father Benet (his spiritual father) and Bérulle a fatal departure from the main stream of mystical apprehension of reality which can be traced from the Upanishads through the Neo-Platonists, St. Augustine, Dionysius to such mediaeval mysticism as that of Eckhart, Tauler or "*The Cloud of Unknowing*." This "Bérullian revolution," so he affirms, diverted that main channel of mystical apprehension towards a "new mystico-Catholic philosophy of life," a "subordination of direct mystical experience to personalistic theology." This, according to Mr. Huxley and his school of neo-Buddhist thought, was a fatal apostasy. For "there cannot be adherence to persons or personal qualities without analysis and imagination; and where analysis and imagination are active, the mind is unable to receive into itself the being of God." Hence the division of consciousness of which to-day we reap the whirlwind. "From the beginning of the eighteenth century onwards," he finds, "the sources of mystical knowledge have been steadily diminishing in number all over the planet. We are dangerously far advanced into the darkness."

That is the thesis. His diagnosis of lack of profundity in modern faith seems self-evident. It seems all too clear that our faith is sterile because it is shallow, and that it is only by, in Professor Hocking's phrase, a "deepening to the essence" of religion that it can recapture its lost dynamic. This clash between the Christian and the power-ethic occurs because we have somehow lost the way to the real "power-house" of spiritual being.

The way back seems, indeed, to be that which Mr. Huxley suggests, a renewed apprehension of that secret Reality which lies below the surface of conventional piety, and that, for Mr. Huxley, means mysticism. But

"mysticism" is a much abused term commonly associated with the Buddhistic identification of the self with the divine Self which he propounds; it is, perhaps, preferable to speak rather of "mystical theology" or the "way of contemplation" for that "deepening to the essence" of religion which Mr. Huxley enjoins. In this less specialized sense it seems abundantly clear that the way back to the wells of true power is not by the discard of the mystic way but by a pursuit of it more profound, rigorous and realistic than any which, for the most part, our modern religion either evinces or conceives.

MR. HUXLEY'S HERESIES

It is as to the nature of this mystical approach that Christianity and such neo-Buddhism as that of Mr. Huxley (and that of Mr. Gerald Heard) conflict. It seems as simple for Christianity to diagnose Mr. Huxley's heresy as for him to diagnose its disease. For this doctrine assumes that immediate apprehension of and, therefore, the possibility of absorption in deity is within the power of man. Man has not only no need of mediation or a Mediator, but, in so far as he admits mediation, he corrupts and divides his aboriginal power of direct apprehension of God.

Such a mysticism evidently postulates the potential divinity of man and denies the Christian doctrine of the "Persons" of the Godhead and the mediation of the Incarnate Christ and the Church—the very pattern of a "personalistic theology." It is, moreover, wholly contrary to orthodox Christianity in that it affirms, as its fundamental postulate, that man is capable of attaining union with God independently of the mediation of Christ, Church or priest—in fact that he can save his own soul and remain the "master of his fate." Thus this doctrine denies original sin and affirms both Pelagianism and titanism, the religion of the Man-God, of Man in process of deification.

It is plainly impossible to reconcile this doctrine or this cure for our condition with Christianity; if Mr. Huxley is right, Christianity is wrong; where Mr. Huxley seeks a merger, Christianity points to mediation (or meeting) with deity. In fact it constitutes the most profound of contemporary challenges to Christianity; here is titanism pushed to the nth degree. It is a doctrine which appeals immediately to a real if rudimentary religious feeling for which, on the one hand, the doctrine of original sin and, on the other, the

concept of personality in the Godhead are very real stumbling-blocks.

It can only be finally refuted by a spiritual experience which can neither be rationalized nor fully expressed. Only they who know both Christ and sin as fact can *know* that this thesis is false to fact, and such a factual knowledge cannot be communicated by argument. Nevertheless, one fact can be adduced which goes far to controvert this doctrine of mysticism—the fact, which can hardly be denied to-day, that, in all its forms, titanism has most palpably failed, that, in all his faculties, man has been shown to be corrupt. The cancerous growths of that corruption fester upon the face of the world.

Nor does this doctrine of mysticism without mediation tally with mystical experience. For, in point of fact, such illumination and union is never unmediated or independent of some "Way" or pattern of life and behaviour; in our psychical as in our physical life we are conditioned creatures. On the contrary, that state is attained only by the rigid following of a rigid "Way." It is a "Way" which approximates, in every case, to the Christian Way.

THE CHRISTIAN CONCEPTION OF PERSONALITY

But—and here is the crux of the question—the Christian Way is also a Person Who is "the Way, the Truth and Life," "that strange and glimmering Presence," as Evelyn Underhill said, "standing on the frontier between the divine and human worlds." Thus the problem of mediation in the mystical life becomes also the problem of personality and of that "meeting" and frontier-life of man which Christianity implies. For it is precisely the concept of personality (and, therefore, of Christ) and so of such a meeting and frontier-faith which the Huxleian mysticism would have us discard. We are led, therefore, to the ultimate problem of the nature of personality. Is personality in fact a phenomenon which is a corruption or a consummation of life?

The issue is one which would need at least a Supplement to itself. But I am more and more persuaded that the difficulty which so many find in the "personalistic theology" of Christianity and the avidity with which they fall for such theosophies as this are due to the almost universal confusion between the terms "individuality" and "personality." In ordinary and often in cultured usage, these terms tend to be interchangeable. But such

an equation is a sorry travesty of the true and profound Christian concept of personality which, as I conceive it to be, I can only suggest here.

I am sure that it is the very antithesis to the particularity, the self-isolation, the obstacle to Being which Mr. Huxley seems to conceive. For the Christian personality is not that which obscures, but that which reveals Being. It implies a rebirth from the particularity of individual existence; in personality individuality has died and been reborn, has been sacrificed and transcended. It implies "self-naughting"; a person is a mirror of Reality, the ideal Christian person is the mirror of Christ as Christ is the mirror of God. Therefore, the pattern of personality is the pattern of the Cross; it is a "dying into life" and a reborn being beyond life's "tragic climax." And it is the fruit of choice; we are born individuals; we can choose whether we will be transformed into persons; that choice is the choice of the Cross.

For the Christian personality is thus neither the frustration nor the corruption but the consummation of consciousness; it is in the throes of awareness that personality comes to birth. It is no opaque screen interposed between the soul and God, but that crystalline and selfless clearness which is the meeting-place and medium for communion between God and man. It is thus only in the terms of Christian thinking that the concept of personality really makes sense.

For such a Christian concept of personality, therefore, the failure and fatal division of consciousness to be found in Father Joseph, as in our modernity, is due, not to concentration upon the Person and Passion of Christ, but to a failure really to apprehend Christ as Mediator, the Word of meeting between divine and human, spirit and nature, the religious

and the secular life, and the nature of personality as the medium of that meeting and mediation. It is a failure, a sundering of soul and spirit, nature and grace, of which the seeds were sown in the Renaissance, a malady for which the doctrine that "all real life is meeting" seems the true and healing corrective. But that is another story.

That is where, by action and reaction, Mr. Huxley leads me, and I am profoundly grateful for that leading. He convinces me that it was not because of the personalism of Father Joseph's mysticism that he was misled, but because of its insufficiency, and that the way of regeneration is not by such a bypassing of personality as Mr. Huxley suggests, but by the royal road of true personality Christianly conceived and a mysticism not less but more "Christo-centric." It is a way, moreover, not of fear, but of fulfilment of consciousness, not back but on. It is the way of meeting, of true community; when men really meet and commune together they are no longer at war either in themselves or with those with whom they thus meet, not as objects but as persons. It is in the dimension of personality that men really meet; that dimension is the land of love. It is a land in which we may not yet be able continuously to dwell; we can at least live upon its frontier. In fact, the personality and mediation of meeting which Mr. Huxley rejects become, for the Christian vision, the very "headstone of the corner." With that "white stone" we may perhaps, by the grace of God, be enabled to rebuild the broken arch of our being. A society which by its structure secures that way of meeting and that deep communion with Being, fosters the seeds of its salvation.

Yours ever,

M. CHANING-PEARCE

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